

## blue-flowering edibles

145



**SPIDERWORT** (*Tradescantia virginiana*, *T. ohiensis*, *T. bracteata*)

FLOWERS: April - June

DESCRIPTION: Parallel veined, long leaves. Thick stem producing purple flowers at stem tips. Spiderwort Family.

HABITAT: Open wood slopes, valleys

LOCATION: *T. virginiana*... eastern Missouri;  
*T. ohiensis*...statewide;  
*T. bracteata*...scattered in southern Missouri

COLLECTION: March - June

USES: Salad, potherb

147

This beautiful, deep purple wildflower is a tasty addition to a wild salad. The leaves and stems may both be cut up and used.

It also is a good potherb fixed alone or with other greens. This does not need to be cooked long, just boiled in salted water for a few minutes and coated with butter.

**DAYFLOWER** (*Commelina communis*,  
*C. caroliniana*,  
*C. diffusa*,  
*C. erecta*)

FLOWERS: May - October

DESCRIPTION: Flower has 2 blue upper petals larger than the white lower petal. Leaves are wide, but parallel-veined. Plant reclines somewhat. Spiderwort Family.

148

HABITAT: Cultivated and waste ground, moist soil, low woods, thickets

LOCATION: *C. communis*... lightly scattered statewide; *C. caroliniana*... Jackson County only (Steiermark); *C. diffusa*... southern and central Missouri; *C. erecta*... southern and central Missouri

COLLECTION: May - October

USES: Potherb



The dayflower is a reputedly questionable edible. While most edible sources do not even list it, Fernald and Kinsey suggest that the group is not considered poisonous and experiments are in order.

My experiments indicated the potherb to be mild, rather bland, and therefore certainly not disagreeable.

I boiled dayflowers in salt water for a short period and seasoned in the following ways: 1) added bacon drippings; 2) doused in butter; 3) mixed with vinegar.

All three ways were appealing. More experiments are in order. The fleshy roots of *C. erecta* varieties can also be cooked as a vegetable.

### **VIOLETS** (*Viola* species)

FLOWERS: March - June

DESCRIPTION: Flowers are irregular, 2 large petals above with 3 smaller ones below. Leaves vary with species. Violet Family.

HABITAT: Widely varied

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: March - June

USES: Salad, confection, soup, jelly



149

This pretty, blue spring flower has several wild edible uses. The leaves and petals may be added to a salad and eaten raw. The leaves are very mucilaginous and therefore a good thickener in soup. It may be used in a vegetable soup as you would okra. Because of this thickening ability, it is often called wild okra.

For a wild sweet tooth, the petals may be dipped in stiff egg whites, rolled in sugar and allowed to dry. Another use for the flowers is in making jelly. Place the flowers in a jar, packing rather firmly. Pour boiling water over the flowers in the jar, cap and allow this to stand for 24 hours. Pour off the liquid and proceed as with regular jelly. Measure the liquid poured off the petals. Put the liquid in a large saucepan and add a package of Sure-Jell per four cups. When the mixture comes almost to a boil, add a cup of sugar for every cup of liquid measured earlier. Cook until the jelly slithers off the spoon.

It's an interesting side-dish for a dinner party. After all, how many times have you been served violet jelly?

**SELF-HEAL** (*Prunella vulgaris*)

FLOWERS: May - September

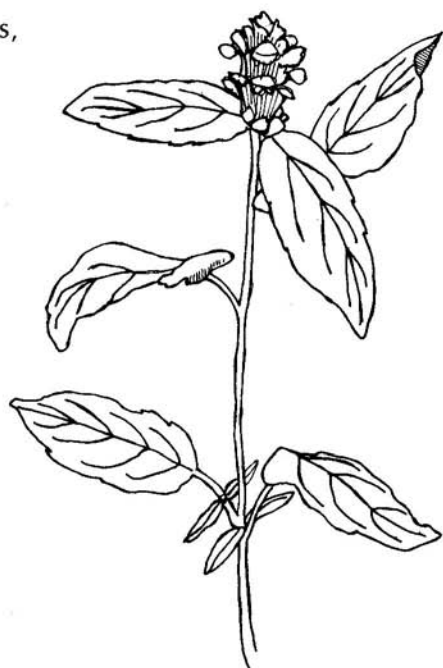
DESCRIPTION: Square stem,  
tight flowering head.  
Opposite leaves, often  
with a purple cast on  
bottom.

HABITAT: Low woodlands,  
borders, banks and  
gravel bars of streams,  
ponds, ditches, pas-  
tures, prairies, fields,  
railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: May -  
September

USES: Tea



The common names of self-heal and heal-all were used because some Indians believed it to heal or cure most illnesses. Self-heal must be found the world over, because an old Italian proverb says: "He that hath self-heal and sanicle [black snakeroot] needs no other physician."

A tea is made by soaking the broken leaves in cold water. The leaves may also be dried, powdered and soaked in cold water. This is a bit unusual in that most herb teas are to be drunk warm or hot for the greatest benefit.

**BELFLOWER** (*Campanula*  
species)

FLOWERS: May - October

DESCRIPTION: Tall, upright  
plant. Leaves alternate,  
toothed, smaller toward  
top of stem. Bell-  
shaped, purple flowers  
blooming up the stalk.  
Bellflower Family.

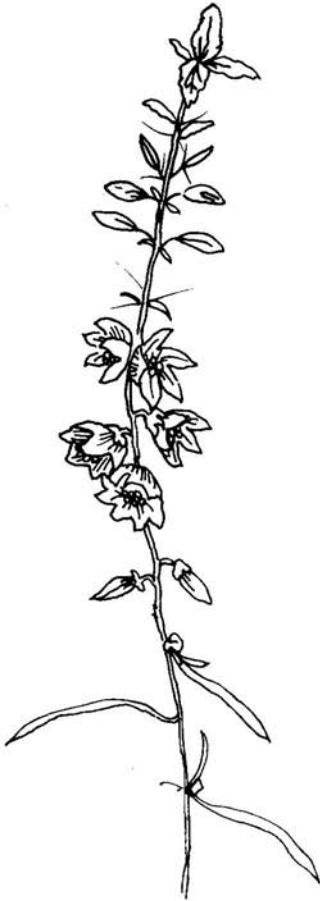
HABITAT: Rich, moist  
woodland, woods  
borders, thickets

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: May - June

USES: Salad, vegetable

151



The tall bellflower is eaten as a green or vegetable while young. The creeping bellflower puts on an edible root in September. These branches from the rootstalk are edible raw in a salad. When cooked they are said to be not unlike parsnips.

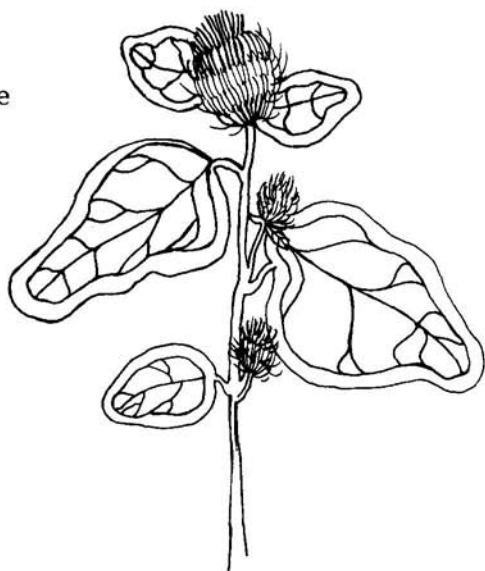
**BURDOCK** (*Arctium minus*)

FLOWERS: July - October

DESCRIPTION: Large elephant-ear leaves, rough and purplish on long stems. Flowers are thistle-like and form burs.

HABITAT: Waste ground, barnyards and dwellings, woodland, thickets, railroads

- 152 LOCATION: Scattered  
COLLECTION: May - June  
USES: Salad, cooked vegetable, potherb, soup, confection, pie, coffee substitute



---

CAUTION: See page 228

---

There are some interesting tales associated with burdock and its powers of strength and endurance. Personally, I believe those powers are already given to any forager willing to scout, pull, dig and clip this plant for eating.

Burdock is a biennial plant. The first year it forms large elephant-ear leaves on long green stems with purple on the upper portion which resembles wild rhubarb. The second year it sends up a bloom stalk with purple flowers. These flowers form burs that stick to clothing in the fall.

The first-year plants provide an edible root, much acclaimed by the Japanese, and the leaf stalks are used as a rhubarb. If you fancy rhubarb pie, try burdock "Wild Rhubarb" Pie. Cut 3 cups of the first-year burdock petioles into 1" pieces. Place in a pie crust

and cover with 1 cup sugar, 3 T flour,  $\frac{1}{2}$  t grated orange peel, a dash of salt and a lump of oleo. Cover with a top crust and bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes or until brown. It is stringy in texture.

I made a burdock dessert dumpling that used red hots, but I was not very pleased with the results. The pith may be eaten raw in a salad, or candied. Burdock Candy is made by boiling the burdock stems in  $\frac{1}{4}$  t soda and then again in plain water for 15-20 minutes each time. Cut the stems into 1" chunks. Add as much sugar as you have burdock stems, enough water to dissolve the sugar and the juice of either an orange or a lemon. Cook the stems in this syrup until the syrup nearly evaporates. Drain and roll in sugar. This reminds me ever so slightly of candied orange peel or lemon peel. While I prefer the lemon flavoring, it is not something I'd go out of my way to fix. However, I think it might be neat to do out-of-doors on a campout sometime.

153

The second-year plant has the edible bloom stalk and the young tops may be used as a potherb. In my first attempts to cook this vegetable, I found the stems fibrous. They do improve if cooked in two waters, the first with a pinch of soda which helps to soften them. Also, the stalks must be gathered early enough in the growth process. They taste a bit like parsnips. Boil for 20 minutes with  $\frac{1}{4}$  t soda, then cook in plain water.

The bloom stalk may be fried, boiled or baked in or out of meat as well as made into candy as the leaf stalk was used.

Ready, Set, now Go eat up those pesky weeds!!





**CHICORY** (*Cichorium  
intybus*)

FLOWERS: May - October

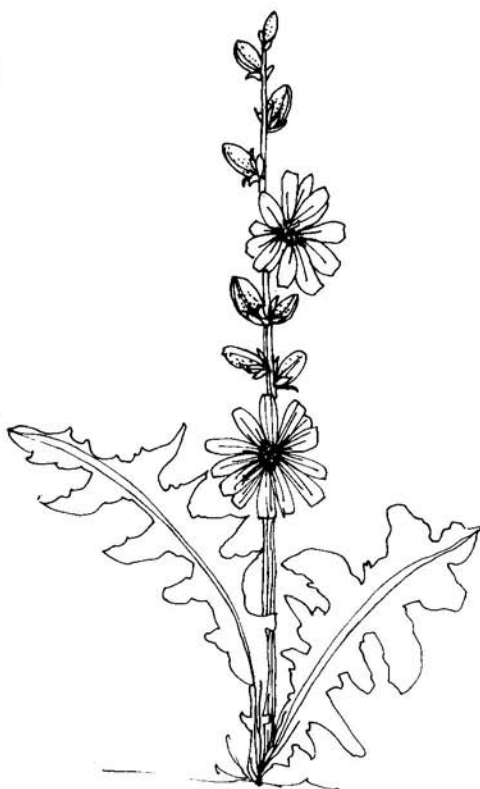
DESCRIPTION: Basal,  
dandelion-like leaves.  
Blue flowers directly  
attached to stem. Rays  
of flowers are blunt and  
fringed or notched.  
Composite Family.

HABITAT: Fields, pastures,  
waste ground, road-  
sides, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide  
except in southeastern  
and midwestern  
counties

COLLECTION: March - April,  
leaves, root-vegetable;  
June - August, root for  
coffee

USES: Salad, potherb,  
vegetable, jelly, coffee



The sources I've read indicate that chicory has powers powerful enough to make a lover faithful, keep coffee from affecting the heart, make an accurate timetelling clock and a meal fit for a king.

In days gone by, when witchcraft and love potions were fashionable, a chicory drink was reportedly served to one's lover and the powers therein kept the lover true.

The chicory flower was served as a sweetmeat during the reign of King Charles II of England, and the flowers in Sweden open at 5:00 a.m. and close up at 10:00 a.m., telling time of sorts.

Today chicory is still used as a coffee substitute. While it does not contain caffeine, it is best when mixed with regular coffee grounds and perked.

In early spring, the rosette not only resembles the dandelion but has that same bitter taste for which the dandelion is famous. I personally prefer to cook these friends in several waters to tone down the flavor. Although I realize some of the vitamins are lost, the final source is still much richer than most prepared vegetables. The chicory leaves are good potherb material to be added to the more mild tastes of lamb's quarters, stinging nettle or poke. The leaves do need to be gathered before the bloomstalk appears as they are VERY bitter afterwards.

The flowers can be used raw in a salad, as can the very young leaves and chicory crowns. The pretty blue flowers make a good jelly. To make the jelly, collect the flowers and remove the sepals. Allow the petals to steep in boiling water for 24 hours. Strain off the liquid and measure. For every cup of liquid, add a cup of sugar along with a teaspoon of orange juice and a small piece of peel. Add a package of Sure-Jell for every four cups of liquid. As with all jellies, the pectin is added to the liquid and brought to a boil. As the mixture begins to boil, add the sugar, juice and peeling. Cook this until it slithers off the spoon.

155

While I have not read of such, I would not be surprised if the flowers make a wine, just as the dandelion flowers are known to do. With that in mind, I spent a day picking chicory flowers. It took several hours of picking to collect a tight pint. Then for each hour spent gathering flowers, one and one-half times that was spent separating the sepals from the petals as the sepals are quite bitter. Unless you have loads of time on your hands, I suggest you wait on this project. Nonetheless, the taste is not bad. The recipe I followed was originally geared for a gallon, but lacking that amount I altered it for a pint. Pour 1 pint boiling water over petals and allow to steep for three days. Add a heaping  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup sugar, juice of a small orange half, with the peel grated, 1 tablespoon lemon juice and a small piece of fresh wild ginger root. Return all of the mixed ingredients to the crock and place a small section of a yeast cake on a small piece of toasted rye bread. Cover the crock and leave in a warm room for 6 days. Strain the mixture, put in bottles and cap loosely, perhaps with a wad of cotton. Keep in a dark place three weeks, decant, cap and the longer you leave it alone the better!

The taproots, again resembling our look-alike twin the dandelion, are dug up by using a dandelion fork. The roots of chicory are a bit bigger than those of the dandelion, and must be thoroughly scrubbed and roasted in 250-degree or 300-degree oven

for four or more hours until they break or snap easily and are dark brown inside. These sections are ground and used a bit more sparingly than regular coffee. The roots may be dug in midsummer for coffee use.

These same roots, dug early in the spring, make a vegetable similar to parsnips. The edible portion, a small white central core, must be peeled out. A flour may be ground from the dried small core, again gathered before the bloomstalk appears, to be used in hot breads. As in so many wild preparations, there is LOADS of work for small amounts. Nonetheless, it has earned its place as a wild edible.

Let's show more respect for the blue, roadside wildflower!

